CHAPTER 15 『NOTHING'S CHANGED』

NEXT UP IS THE THIRD SINGLES MATCH! THAT'S AGARI'S TURN!
COME ON, SUZUMEGAHARA, VICTORY'S WITHIN ARM'S REACH!
GOOD LUCK, AGARI!
AGARI-CHAN!
WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU, WHITE PANTIES.
OKAY.
THEN AGAIN, IF I WIN THIS MATCH, VICTORY AUTOMATICALLY GOES TO SUZUMEGAHARA,
SO THERE WOULDN'T BE A FOURTH SINGLES MATCH.
ARE YOU SURE YOU WOULDN'T PREFER IT IF I LOST, KOYORI?
!!

O-OF COURSE NOT! I'M CHEERING FOR YOU!
HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT, AGARI-CHAN?!
まげーっ!!
CALM DOWN, I'M JUST KIDDING.
AGARI-CHAN,
YOU BETTER NOT LOSE!
LEAVE IT TO ME.

KUMAMI!
PLEASE, WIN THIS ONE, KUMAMI-SENPAI!
IT'S UP TO YOU NOW, KUMAMI!
THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE...
WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU, KUMAMI-SAN.
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YOU HAVE TO WIN, NO MATTER WHAT.
...
ぎゅうう...
GIVE ME A CHANCE TO PLAY.

I'LL DEFINITELY WIN THIS MATCH.
YES, CAPTAIN KOHIME.
KUMAMI, YOU GOT THIS!
FIGHT!
AGARI-SENPAI!
GO FOR IT! AGARI!

IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
I MEAN IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME..
SINCE I LAST PLAYED AGAINST YOU
TWO OR THREE MONTHS
NO.
IT HAS, SINCE THAT DAY WHEN YOU GUYS WERE RETURNING FROM TRAINING CAMP, SO...
I'VE BEEN WANTING TO FACE YOU AGAIN.
EVER SINCE YOUR SUDDEN DEPARTURE FROM SUZUME-GAHARA,

DO YOU REMEMBER?
WE HAD AN EVEN SCORE AGAINST EACH OTHER, 51 WINS EACH.
LET'S SETTLE THIS TODAY.
THIS MATCH WILL DECIDE WHICH ONE OF US IS THE BEST,
KU-MAMI!
SURE.
LET'S HAVE A GOOD MATCH, A-CHAN!

SHE HASN'T CHANGED AT ALL...
THAT BURNING FIGHTING SPIRIT, THOSE SERIOUS EYES AS SHE STARES AT HER OPPONENT...
IF I HAD A CHOICE...
I WOULDN'T PLAY AGAINST A-CHAN...
ぎゅうう。
BUT THAT WOULD BE SELFISH OF ME... RIGHT?

FOURTH MATCH, SINGLES 3
KAMI'A AGARI (SUZUMEGAHARA MIDDLE SCHOOL)
VS
TSUKINOWA KUMAMI (TSUBAME GIRLS' ACADEMY)
LOVE-ALL!
TSUKINOWA-SAN USED TO BE A SUZUME-GAHARA CLUB MEMBER, RIGHT?

KUMA!!
KUMA!! IS...
WHAT KIND OF PLAYER IS SHE?
HMM?
BLUSH
キュッ
A CHOP-PER.
THE SAME AS ME.

THOUGH SHE'S A DIFFERENT KIND OF CHOPPER.
?!

HER CHOPS ARE
CURVED.

T-THE BALL CURVED!
THAT'S CALLED A SIDE-SPIN CHOP.
おおっ!!
?!
(KUMAMI) 1 - 0 (AGARI)
NORMAL CHOP
SLIDING THE RACKET UNDER THE BALL CREATES THE USUAL DOWNSPIN.
SHE PUTS TILTED DOWN-SPIN ONTO THE BALL, MAKING IT CURVE.
SIDE-SPIN CHOP
STRIKING THE BALL LATERALLY CREATES A TILTED DOWNSPIN.

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AS THE BALL CURVES ...
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THE OPPONENT IS FORCED TO CHASE THE BALL FURTHER
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IT'S ALSO HARDER TO AIM AT THE BALL PRECISELY
クッ…
HITTING THE SWEET SPOT, IN PARTICULAR, BECOMES VERY DIFFICULT
カッ
BECAUSE OF THAT...
THEY'RE LIKELY TO MISS THE SHOT
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OR LOSE THEIR HITTING STRENGTH.
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IT'S ALMOST AS IF...
SHE'S RAISING A BARRIER AROUND HERSELF.

I CAN'T GET THE USUAL POWER INTO MY SHOTS WHILE SHE'S STOPPING ME FROM GETTING INTO A FIRM STANCE
IT'S GONNA BE HARD TO SCORE LIKE THIS!

CURVE YOUR CHOPS LEFT AND RIGHT,
AND SEIZE CONTROL OF THE MATCH.
THAT'S KUMAMI'S SECRET DEFENCE TECHNIQUE,
THE BEARRIER.

SH-
SHUT UP!
UH...
UM...
TALK ABOUT A LAME NAME, RIGHT? THAT AGARI!
BY THE WAY, THAT NAME WAS WHITE PANTIES' IDEA.
BEAR-
...
RIER?!
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...!
BUT THAT'S A SMALL PRICE TO PAY.
THE DOWNSIDE IS THAT I FEEL EMBARRASSED, SO MY FACE GETS ALL RED EVERY TIME I USE THIS CHOP...
BLUSH

OH, DEAR A-CHAN,
WHAT A LAME BUT CUTE NAME YOU'VE GIVEN TO MY TECHNIQUE.
I'LL TREASURE IT
FOREVER AND EVER!

...
BEAR-RIER?
...
BUT THIS IS KUMAMI-SAN WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.
What terrible naming sense.
Yeah.
!
NO.
WHAT'S GOING ON? THIS ISN'T KUMAMI'S USUAL STYLE, RIGHT?

SHE MUST BE THINKING OF SOMETHING.

THEY'RE STILL ON THE SAME RALLY! AGARI-CHAN CAN'T SCORE A SINGLE POINT.
WELL, KUMAMI RIVALS THE CAPTAIN IN DEFENDING SKILLS!
THERE'S ALSO THE BEARRIER PUSHING DOWN HER SHOOTING STRENGTH. SO THERE'S NOTHING SHE CAN DO.
BEAUTIFUL!
SHE'S HITTING THE BALL SO CAREFULLY...
BEAUTIFUL! BEAUTIFUL!
AND THAT AGILE BACKHAND SHOT...
PLAYING WITH A-CHAN LIKE THIS REMINDS ME OF MY DAYS AT SUZUMEGAHARA.
THIS IS SO NOSTALGIC. NOTHING'S CHANGED.
CERTAINLY...
THIS PART WILL BE JUST LIKE OLD TIMES TOO.
BLUSH

AFTER SHE TRIES SO HARD TO SCORE WITH HER BACKHAND...
I'LL SEND AN EASY BALL TO HER FOREHAND SIDE, AND SHE'LL GO FOR IT, DETERMINED TO SCORE,
BUT SHE'S NOT VERY GOOD WITH FOREHAND SMASHES, SO SHE'LL MISS THE SHOT.

BUT...
THAT BOLD ATTACK IS ALSO BEAUTIFUL, IN ITS OWN WAY.

(KUMAMI) 5 - 1 (AGARI)

SCORE! AGARI USED HER FOREHAND SMASH!
TIME FOR THE COUNTER-ATTACK!
THAT FORE-HAND SMASH.
I THOUGHT A-CHAN'S FOREHAND SMASH WAS WEAK.
...
WHAT?
NO...
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN A LUCKY SHOT.
キュッ
フッ

AGARI IS REALLY NAILING THOSE FOREHAND SMASHES TODAY!
SHE DID IT AGAIN!
...!
TWICE IN A ROW?!
NO WAY...

IS THIS... REALLY A-CHAN?!
NO WAY, NO WAY!
SHE'S HITTING THEM PERFECTLY, AS IF IT CAME NATURALLY TO HER!
THIS ISN'T THE A-CHAN I KNOW.
...
IT CAN'T BE...
YOUR BEARRIER MIGHT BE TOUGH TO DEAL WITH, BUT...
!

ALL I HAVE TO DO IS MAKE THEM...
IF YOU'RE PUSHING DOWN THE STRENGTH OF MY SHOTS,
EVEN STRONGER!
SHE'S BUILDING UP STRENGTH FROM HER KNEE!
THAT STANCE, IT'S A...

LOOP DRIVE!

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女学園

YOU DIDN'T KNOW, DID YOU?
GO! AGARI-CHAN!

THAT I LEARNED HOW TO SHOOT A FOREHAND SMASH!
YEAH!

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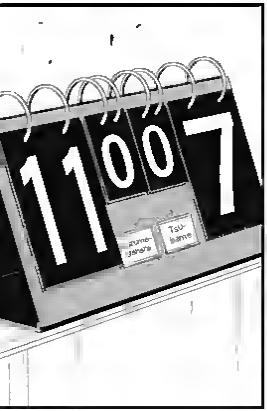
…!
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED, KUMAMI.
YOU CAN'T BEAT ME LIKE THAT.
月輪

YOU'RE IN FOR A BIG SURPRISE IF YOU THINK I'M THE SAME AS BACK THEN.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